

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE, CORRUPT?
Harringay United Church-Baptist
Sunday 7th June 2009.

Text: Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction:

Today we continue our series on 'what kind of Church are we? In addition, I want to remind you that when we talk about Church, we mean the people who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus who are called Christians today. Therefore, when we talk about what kind of Church are we, we are asking ourselves 'what kind of person am I?' or what kind of person are you? The question is both corporate and individual and it's double-sided question.

You have heard about the loveless church of Ephesus, the persecuted Church of Smyrna and the compromising Church of Pergamos. Today we are moving to the corrupt Church of Thyatira {**Thuateira** (thoo-at'-i-rah)}

Location, Industry and Religion:

Thuateira is located 40 miles Southeast of Pergamos. It is situated at the mouth of a long valley, which connects the valleys of rivers Hermus and Lycus. Through this valley runs the trade route from Byzantium to Smyrna.

The name "Thyatira" means "the castle of Thya." It is a small military and commercial town. It is noted for agricultural produce and clothing dyeing industry. Because of these features, it has many trade guilds (like professional bodies today) and if you have many trades and professional bodies that have their own gods, idolatry and immorality will abound. It is like today when you do not belong to the cult or culture of a particular trade or profession you may not progress in your career and may not get justice.

Before the time of Nicator who re-found Thyatira, the place was regarded as a holy city, for there stood the temple of the ancient Lydian sun-god, Tyrimnos. There is the temple of Sanmbethe where a prophetess was serving.

It also has the temples for Artemis and Apollos. It was not a centre for Caesar's worship; hence, Christian persecution was on the low side.

The famous Lydia who deals with Purple dyes that we read about in Acts 16 lived in this town.

There is nothing much left as relics in Thyatira today, the town that is there now is called **Akhisar** or **Akisar**,

This trade guild is still powerful today in various parts of the world. They may not call it guild; it could be trade unions, cultures and cults.

A colleague of mine at Spurgeon's College told us about his career in the MET. He was due for promotion but because he refused to join the Freemason, he was denied. A colleague of his told him all the questions they will ask at the interview and the person they will give the job to despite the fact the other person was less qualified and experienced they still give him the job. Thank God, that he did not compromise; now he is a servant of God.

There is another true story of a man who was to work at a higher level in the smallest but rich borough of London but because he refused to respond in a cultic way, he was not given the job.

As we have then, so we have them now and it will continue to be worse until the Messiah returns. I urge you to keep what you have (salvation) it will pay off later.

Description of Jesus:

Jesus is always describing himself in different ways that suits each Church. To the Church at Thuateira, He described himself as the *'Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze'*.

He said exactly who he is 'the Son of God who has been given all authority to rule and judge righteously, the position he assumes since his glorification after his resurrection. What does this description mean?

His eyes are like blazing fire that sees beyond ordinary eyes but far into the hearts, intents and motives.

His feet like are like burnished bronze, which is strong, and shines brilliantly and stamps down all evils and his enemies.

Both the eyes like blazing fire and the brilliant reflection of his feet symbolises the indignation and righteous judgment.

Commendation:

Jesus gave five commendations to this Church for their:

Love: I presume their love if for God and their fellow people which is very good.

Faith: of course in God and Jesus Christ

Service: to God and their fellow people

Perseverance: Their ability to persevere and hanging on in spite of persecution and difficulties.

Improvement on their past.

Hearing this from Jesus the Master is a wao! reaction. One wonders what else does a church need to have that the Thuateiran Church does not have. To me and probably some people, on the surface of it, this is enough. They deserve an accolade but that is the view of human flesh that sees only the surface and not the hearts.

It is interesting to note the contrast between this Church and the Church at Ephesus. The strength of Ephesus was the weakness of the Church in Thuateira and the strength in Thuateira is the weakness in Ephesus.

Listen to what the one who sees beyond the eyes says.

Rebuke:

Rev 2 20 " Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols."

What does this mean?

The trade guilds sacrifice animals; pour alcohol as libation to appease to their goddesses to look on them and their business with favour. These foods and alcohol are now shared among the members to eat as fellowship meal. They also invite anyone they wanted so that they too can prosper.

There are several suggestions put forward by Barclays to the interpretation of this verse.

1. Some suggested that there is a woman in the Church (whom Jesus called Jezebel which is not her real name) who claims to be a prophetess was the wife of the Bishop in Thuateira and she teaches people that sexually immorality is OK and eating food sacrificed to idols is nothing. Therefore, she undid the good work her husband was doing.
2. Another suggestion is that this Jezebel was a Jewess woman called Sambathe who was devoted to Judaism and would do everything possible to oppose Christianity
3. There is other suggestion that the woman was Lydia and because she deals with purple clothing materials, belonging to the guild protects her trade and ensures prosperity. Since she prospers in this way, it is not difficult to persuade others to do the same. If the results were there, what else would people need, than to do as their master.

I do not subscribe to any of these suggestions because knowing the particular person is not so important as to know what she did and its consequences. If the personal identity was of any importance, Jesus would not hesitate to do so.

The most significant things are the sins of adultery by Idolatry and teaching others to do the same. This is a serious offence in the sight of God. Jesus said in *Matt 18:6* *“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*

There are many more Jezebels today in the Church, self-appointed prophets and prophetesses, who are idol worshipers and encouraged others to do the same.

If you see a practice that is unbiblical in any congregation, be wary of that. Prohibition of eating some foods (not the one offered to idols prohibited by God) because they want to honour God, enchanting something that is outside the scripture and teaching people how to speak in tongues, prophesy, working miracles etc.

I call this syncretism. They claim to believe God but deny His absolute power to do all things without needing human influence. These people give Satan priority over God. Friends, I plead with you watch out; do not be lured into these things. You cannot bow down to work's idolatry culture, not the politically correctness principles that is opposed to the Word of God, it is wrong. You cannot belong to freemason and Christ together. Darkness and light has nothing in common. Christ is all-sufficient for your salvation, living and work.

The Grace and Mercy of Christ:

Jesus has given this woman time to repent of her immorality but she is not willing to repent. Now He pronounces judgment that He will strike her with illness on her bed. The same bed she uses to commit her immorality will be used to judge her. Since what people like most often kills them, Jezebel's bed which she uses to commit her sexual immorality and idolatry will be her trap because she refused to repent.

Please note verse 22 that those she convinced to engage in the same sin will be brought to justice as well, but if they should repent, they will be forgiven.

The punishment is not only on they who committed the sins but Christ will strike Jezebel's children dead and the whole Church will know that Christ searches the

hidden things in the heart. He will also reward each person according to his/her work. It is clear from this passage that Christ is always waiting for us too to repent of our sins and we must never take his patience as weakness and inability to act, it is just pure grace and mercy that He is showing us.

The Faithful Ones:

The situation in Thuateira is not general to all the worshippers, there were still some who have not bowed down to other gods, who have refused to belong to the cult that worship Ceaser and who have not learned Satan's so called deep secrets. Christ admonished them to hold on to what they have and do the will of God. They should not be deceived by quick results, magical outcomes, here and now results. Instead, they should be fervent, persevere and endure until the end.

Rewards:

Those who endure until the end will receive authority over nations as judge and ruler with Christ. Christ will transfer to them the authority the Father gave him.

In addition, He will give them 'morning star'. Jesus used this title for himself in Revelation 22:16. This may mean two things.

1. It may mean the resurrection of Christians as a rising sun and not the setting one, the resurrection that all Christians and Jews believe.
2. It may also mean the gift of Christ himself, that we will be so perfect like Jesus and this is exciting.

Both of them are good and nothing stops us from having them

Conclusion:

We have studied 4 out of the 7 letters to the Churches in Asia and it is good to review them.

We may be zealous and orthodox like the Church in Ephesus yet loose our close devotion and love for Christ.

We may be devoted and faithful to Jesus like the Churches in Pergamum and Thyatira but lack the spiritual discernment to distinguish spirits and heresy.

No doubt, the Church at Smyrna is the one without criticism. However, let him who thinks he stands watch out lest he falls (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The challenge of today is to develop ask for the Spirit of discernment to be able to know which prophecy is of God and which one is not. Discerning it is not enough, preventing to lead people astray is better.

Any prophecy that contradicts the Word of God is fake and we must guide against. The first text we read in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 expressly warned us not follow a prophecy that encourages worshipping other gods. But I must warn you that the prophecy will never come direct like that, it will have a greater % of truth but only a tiny may be untrue. It could as simple as 'the Lord asks us not eat meat in order to honour him' when you and I know that God has blessed everything.

May God help us to discern the false prophecies and disallow them to flourish.

Amen.